



CITY OF DURHAM | NORTH CAROLINA

Date: April 21, 2015

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager
Through: Keith Chadwell, Deputy City Manager
From: Mark D. Ahrendsen, Transportation Director
Subject: Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project

Executive Summary

GoTriangle will provide a presentation on the environmental and community data collected for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project. All data for the project is now available from UNC Hospitals to Alston Avenue. The City Council will be requested to provide comments on the project during the public comment period in late summer/fall 2015.

Recommendation

The Department of Transportation recommends that the City Council receive a presentation by GoTriangle on the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project.

Background

GoTriangle is developing the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project, a 17-mile light rail transit project from UNC Hospitals to Alston Avenue. GoTriangle and their consultants are preparing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The DEIS is scheduled to be released in August 2015 for a 45-day public comment period. During this time, the City of Durham will be requested to submit comments on the project to GoTriangle. In November, the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization will decide whether to accept the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project based on the DEIS analysis. If approved, the Federal Transit Administration would issue Final Environmental Impact Statement and a Record of Decision on the project, and the project would be eligible to move into the Project Engineering phase.

The environmental and community data from UNC Hospitals to the station near Duke/VA Hospitals were presented to the City Council in March 2015. Additional time was needed to collect and present all environmental and community data for the alignment east of the Duke/VA Hospital station due to the alignment shift caused by the North Carolina Railroad's track spacing requirements. The Durham City Council and Durham County Commissioners received an update on this modification in January 2015. GoTriangle will present the data now available for this segment.

Issues and Analysis

GoTriangle's presentation will also review the five key decisions to be decided through the EIS for the entire alignment:

- The alignment over Little Creek;
- The alignment over New Hope Creek;
- The station location near Duke/VA Hospitals;
- The location of the Rail Operations and Maintenance Facility; and
- To build or not build the project.

GoTriangle is preparing traffic impact reports to analyze the affect that the project will have on vehicular traffic and circulation. The following areas in the City of Durham will be analyzed:

- Leigh Village station area
- Gateway and Patterson Place station areas
- University Drive
- Erwin Road
- Downtown Durham

GoTriangle will present on the preliminary findings of their analyses for University Drive, Erwin Road, and Downtown. The analyses for Leigh Village and Gateway and Patterson Place station areas require additional time for staff review. Further staff review and coordination is expected to occur on the traffic impacts of the project.

While no decision is requested today on the alternatives, the Durham City Council is asked to carefully review the presented data, consider if there is additional data needed to inform a future decision, and begin to formulate a position on the key decisions. GoTriangle is preparing an Administrative Draft Environmental Impact Statement that is to be sent to the Federal Transit Administration in June. Any comments that the Durham City Council provides at this time may be considered in the creation of this document. However, there will be additional opportunities to provide comments in the future.

Alternatives

The City Council could choose not to receive the presentation. This would not help provide the information that City Council needs to provide informed comments during the 45-day public comment period.

Financial Impact

There is no direct financial impact for the City of Durham related to this presentation. However, the presented alternatives have different cost implications that could affect the competitiveness and financial viability of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project. The project's local funding share is to be provided by the local sales tax and vehicle fees administered by GoTriangle. There may be additional City of Durham costs related to station area infrastructure, impacts to economic development, impacts to City transportation facilities and utilities, etc.

SDBE Summary

Department of Equal Opportunity/Equity Assurance did not review this item for compliance with the Ordinance to Promote Equal Business Opportunities in City Contracting.

Attachments

GoTriangle presentation